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Governing Education through Data: Scotland, England and the European Education Policy Space

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Abstract

This paper draws on interview data from national policy makers in England, Scotland, and the European Commission to illustrate differences in the referencing of ‘Europe’ in education policy-making in England and Scotland in order to highlight the emergent complexity of post-devolution policy making in education through a focus on relations and interactions with Europe, as expressed in the negotiation and development of performance data systems. We suggest that policy makers in England reference global influences, rather than Europe, while policy-makers in Scotland reference Europe in order to project a new positioning of Scotland in closer alignment with Europe. Europeanisation in education thus produces differing policy responses from closely aligned, *indeed, in the case of England and Scotland, contiguous* policy spaces. Thus the paper seeks to contribute to the literature on ‘travelling’ education policy and its ‘local’ mediation, and to connect the development of devolution and the changing policy space of education in Europe.

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Introduction

This paper looks at education policy, and its framing within the devolved polity of the UK (in this case England and Scotland only¹). The discussion is placed within the wider framework of Europeanisation of education, which itself co-exists within an increasingly global education policy field (Ozga and Lingard 2007). We engage here with two sets of dominant assumptions in the academic literature on education policy. The first is that the global, transnational agenda of education policy-making is of greater significance and has more impact than does the European Education Policy Space (EEPS). We suggest that the significance of EEPS is often obscured by ideas about policy that relate to subsidiarity and formal law making, and by its modes of operation through networks, negotiations and benchmarking. Research in the areas of governance and regulation in Europe is developing rapidly, and is ambitious and wide-ranging in scope, but is not yet very much engaged with the policy field of education and its distinctive operation as a means of regulation and governance (Walters and Haahr 2005). In part this is because the dominant disciplines in European Studies-politics and law-may adopt frameworks that do not pick up the significance of education in making Europe, because they often focus exclusively on

¹ The paper is based on the ESRC funded project 'Governing by Numbers: Data and Education Governance in England and Scotland' (RES-000-23-1385), which was part of a Eurocores ECRP 'Fabricating Quality in European Education' that included Denmark, Finland and Sweden, as well as England and Scotland, and was co-ordinated by Jenny Ozga .

formal powers and authorities. Thus the less formal policy instruments and processes that characterize emergent European education policy are less visible (Lawn 2006). As we have argued elsewhere, there is a need for attention to education/learning policy in Europe that documents and analyses both its informal ‘networking’ forms and its reliance on such policy technologies as benchmarks, indicators and the circulation of data (Grek and Lawn, forthcoming; Grek et al. 2009).

The second dominant assumption with which we take issue is that the UK or ‘Britain’ should be understood primarily as a unitary state in relation to education and that the UK government is the only point of reference in talking about education policy developments and the interaction of global and national forces. This assumption is largely implicit in the education policy literature, which often uses the terms ‘Britain’ ‘England’ and the UK interchangeably (though there are honourable exceptions—for example Jones 2003). In the mainstream academic literature on education policy published in the UK, there is either an absence of recognition of the complexity of the education systems there, or passing reference to difference in the ‘other’ regions or sub-national systems. This is a long-standing problem (see Bell et al 1973, Ozga 1979). However since political devolution in 1999, there has been a growth of interest in charting policy convergence and divergence (see, for example Arnott and Menter 2007, Ozga 2005 Raffe 2005). However in the case of England and Scotland within the UK the existence of shared party political control through a Labour government in both Westminster and Holyrood has perhaps contributed to the assumption in the academic literature on education that differences are relatively insignificant, and that pressures for convergence are dominant; while the simultaneous prioritisation of attention to global influences has also tended to

downplay the importance of the 'local'. Academic commentators have certainly identified pressure from Westminster on Labour-led administrations in Scotland from 1999-2007 to adopt key policy priorities of choice, diversity and privatisation, although these were inflected rather differently in Scotland (Arnott and Ozga 2008). The changed political situation in Scotland, following the election of a minority Scottish National Party (SNP) government in May 2007, with an agenda that seeks to emphasise difference from the UK government and ultimately seeks independence for Scotland, strengthens the possibility of divergence, and this development enables greater academic recognition of the complexity of the UK policy space. This paper seeks to illuminate that complexity through a focus on the interactions of the two systems-England and Scotland- with Europe. First we provide some background on the research project on which this paper draws.

The Research project: scope and methodology

The research project on which this paper is based consists of two, interdependent elements. The first is the European Science Foundation (ESF) Eurocores programme three-year project 'Fabricating Quality in European Education' which explores the Europeanisation of education through performance data systems in five European systems: Denmark, England, Finland, Scotland and Sweden. This is a comparative study with a key focus on how European education is being shaped and constructed through 'soft governance' forms (Lawn 2006, Grek et al 2009). The ESRC -funded 'Governing by Numbers' research project is situated within that study, and compares the use of performance data as a form of governance in England and Scotland, through investigation of the translation of performance data into meaning and action in policy in international, national, local and school contexts. Governing

by Numbers is, therefore, interested in comparing how England and Scotland relate to Europe through data, as well as how they compare with one another.

This comparative orientation reflects our attention to context, and a desire to capture the possibilities of simultaneously ‘local’ and global development, and reflect the influence of historically-embedded assumptions and beliefs on the mediation of global policy pressures (Alexiadou and Jones 2001, Ozga 2005). In order to achieve these aims, the ‘Governing by Numbers’ project compares the impact of performance data on policy and governance in England and Scotland at the (inter)national/national interface, examining how European and global processes and associated data collection requirements for compulsory schooling enter these national policy-making spaces. We continue this exploration at the (inter)national/local interface, at the (intra)national/local/school interface and at the school level. Our data collection methods include document analysis of key policy texts that construct data collection and use across these policy spaces. We also conducted semi-structured interviews with key policy actors at the European Commission (5) the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) (5), the Scottish Executive/Scottish Government (5), Local Government officers and analysts in both Scotland and England (20). In selecting these interviewees and defining them as ‘key informants’ we identified people who operated at the interface between the transnational organisations and the national, and between the national and the local: these were members of what Lawn and Lingard (2002) define as a ‘magistrature of influence’.² In addition we carried out case studies of local authorities in both systems (8 cases in all). These case studies were selected to represent both urban and more remote areas, and both highly developed and less developed data systems. The case study methods include

² We were granted access without difficulty to most of the key actors that we identified. We undertook not to attribute their responses to our questions, and we also discussed our interpretation of the data that they provided at a number of policy workshops throughout the duration of the research project.

following a piece of data from its reception by an authority through its development and use within the quality assurance process in the authority and in a school; observation of ‘data work’, including data cleaning and entry for reporting processes, analysis of relevant policy texts and interviews with key system actors responsible for data management. The final element of our study was a survey of teachers and head teachers in both systems, that explored their experiences of, and attitudes to, various forms of data collection and use in schools, including statutory reporting, inspection, self-evaluation and teacher-designed data. The case study and survey data are not reported on here, but are discussed in detail in Ozga, Dahler-Larsen, Segerholm and Simola (forthcoming 2010).

The synthesis and analysis of the data are theory-driven, and draw on culturally and historically-informed approaches to understanding comparison (Novóa and Yariv-Mashal 2003). The essence of Novóa and Yariv-Mashal’s argument is that a new mode of transnational governance of education is emerging, which is based on processes of comparison that create ‘international spectacle’ (for example through OECD’s Programme for International Student Assessment). Comparison is essential to this mode of governance, and the research reported here seeks to work with these ideas in adopting a culturally and historically-informed approach to comparison. Moreover we focus on the creation through data of a European Education Policy Space (EEPS): this ‘space’ is not a formal, legal entity, but is constructed through data, benchmarks and indicators that carry governing principles and establish rules and meanings (Grek, Lawn, Lingard, Ozga, Rinne, Segerholm and Simola 2009:8-9). We are approaching data as an instrument of governance, and seek to illuminate the role of comparison in governing through a focus on the use of data and indicators as a

new ‘calculative rationality’ (Bauman 1992) of modern governance. The relation between government, state construction and data collection (Desrosieres 2002 Porter 1996) and the importance of data, and the agencies which use them, in the development and consolidation of the state, is a theoretical resource for this analysis, along with the idea of the growth of the evaluative state (Neave 1998, Fägerlind & Strömqvist 2004) and the audit society (Power 1999). We also recognise the significance of ‘multiplying spaces’ (Novoa and Yariv-Mashal, Appadurai 1996) and the movement of data among social actors located at a distance from each other in schools, local authorities, agencies and government offices. We suggest that local, national and the European networks are integrated by technologies-including data- as much as by explicit policy, and networks are associated with new models of European governance (Kohler-Koch 1999). In relation to the topic of this paper, we are concerned here to make use of theorisations of the relationship between policy and cultural identities in different national systems (Lindblad and Popkewitz 2000). The remainder of the paper discusses the analysis of interview data from policy actors in England and Scotland, in relation to their use of and references to European policy pressures, especially where they involve data production and use.

In the next section of the paper we explain our approach to Europe and Europeanisation, and locate those ideas in the wider context of globalisation and the influence of transnational agencies. This discussion is necessary because it provides the context within which we report on our data on England and Scotland, and helps to explain the variation in references to Europe between the two nations.

Europeanisation and Globalisation

It can be argued that a European education policy space has been in existence for many years, that indeed it is as old as the European Union. However, education as

a policy space has been acknowledged only recently as an element of the European integration project. The publication of *The History of European cooperation in education and training* by the European Commission (2006) demonstrates the uses of education in ‘making’ Europe. By this we mean the propagation of a conception of Europe as not merely a geographical entity, but as a space of meaning, constructed around common cultural and educational values, ordering schemas and, more recently, shared governing tools. Indeed, from the 1960s onwards, the discourse of a common culture and shared histories was being circulated as a cluster of myths contributing to a European ‘imagined community’ rising from the ashes of a destructive Second World War. Education policy-making for the ‘people’s Europe’ took the form of cultural cooperation, student mobility, harmonization of qualification systems and vocational training (European Commission, 2006). It was not a purely discursive construct, but was pursued through Community programmes, such as the Comett, Erasmus and later PETRA, FORCE and Lingua that involved large numbers of mobile people and travelling ideas (European Commission, 2006). France and Germany led the project from the start, the former ceding governmental autonomy in exchange of greater predominance in Europe, the latter as part of a project of post-war rehabilitation.

In contrast, the UK imagined itself to have retained imperial status and looked on the choice of a European ‘project’ as one of many possibilities (Spiering, 2004). The UK could either engage with Europe, continue its association with the Commonwealth, or build on its ‘special relationship’ with the USA –and this was the preferred option. ‘Delusions of grandeur’ (Spiering, 2004; 140) and even traces of Germanophobia enhanced British ‘difference’ and an Anglo-Saxon identity as distinct

from a European one. The UK was dragged into reluctant partnership in Europe, a role which it has sustained, as indicated in its relatively recent opt-outs from the European Monetary Union and the new Social Charter. In fact, the Treaty of Amsterdam of 1997, which suggested greater flexibility and a 'constructive abstention' approach for the Member-states, illustrates the UK's influence in the project of retaining political powers within the nation-states (Smith, 2001).

In terms of education policy-making, we suggest that attention to American, rather than European models continues to distinguish UK policy, perhaps especially in the period since 1997, and the landscape of education provision in England is closer to that of the USA than to continental Europe. This is reflected in the extent to which 'ideologies of the market' along with adherence to the principles of new institutional economics have driven policy initiatives such as diversity in school provision, the adoption of parental choice, the adherence to competition as the basis of improvement, and the extent of private sector involvement in education (Ball 2006: 70-71). As our data illustrate, continental European practices receive little attention in policy talk in England. In contrast, Europe is, and continues to be, an important reference point for Scottish policy, and its significance is increasing. There is, therefore, the possibility of interaction between the European project and UK political devolution, which may be played out in education policy and which could have an impact on the dynamics of policy development within the UK.

Of course Europe exists within a wider frame of reference, and this explains another aspect of our findings: the failure of many of our informants to distinguish between European Commission policy initiatives and those which are derived from other

sources, such as the OECD, UNESCO or the World Bank. Responding to questions regarding their European links, many interviewees suggested examples derived from their experience with the OECD PISA study (Grek 2009). In other words, there is a persistent trend among policy actors to respond to questions about international contacts through an amalgamation of European and global influences. Does this mean that Europe is invisible in policy talk inside the domestic context, or does it suggest a degree of invisibility of the European education policy space in the global context? In other words, given the shifting meaning of the European project, and its current emphasis on global, neo-liberal agendas, are European and global policy initiatives subsumed into one policy ‘space’ in our interviewees’ perceptions?

We suggested earlier that the project of Europe was in the making from around the 1960s-70s up to the mid-90s: the advent of the knowledge economy and knowledge society in Europe caused an abrupt halt to the discourse around a shared culture and European identity. The ‘People’s Europe’ is being transformed into a Europe of individuals, striving to accomplish the Lisbon goals, indicators and benchmarks. According to Nóvoa (2000), Europe has always been a project which used education to create a common space of meaning. Nonetheless, Laidi (1998) suggests that the imperatives of individualisation and competition in the global market—inherent to the knowledge economy discourse—fail precisely in this task—they do not create a coherent and persuasive collective myth about Europe. According to Lawn,

The relation between knowledge and use value has been heightened by the involvement of technological, cultural and economic areas in new fields of

activity which has broken down the distinction between knowledge creation and use. This argument is familiar. It operates in many policy documents in national contexts around the world, and certainly within the policy frameworks of major international agencies, such as the World Bank and the OECD. It is not specific to the EU (2003; 330).

The UK government has arguably been one of the most influential actors in subsuming the European into the global discourse, especially at times of growing ‘Euro-scepticism’ about the future of an enlarged, ‘multi-speed’ Europe, and in pursuit of its modernisation project. Modernisation of UK education policy tied education very firmly to the economy (DfEE 1997) and involved a shift towards ‘implied consent’ by the public to the problem-solving initiatives of government. These also required the widespread collection and use of data in order to enable the public to be informed, and the displacement of expert or professional judgement. Managerialism reinforced a technical and pragmatic approach to policy-making, driven by a calculus of economy and efficiency (Clarke, Gewirtz and McLaughlin 2000). In education policy-making in England these developments promoted integration (‘joined up policy making’) and sought to involve new partners, particularly private partners (Jones 2000).

Thus we suggest that the concept of Europe is not absent from the education policy narratives of actors in Scotland and England, but that especially in England, it is strongly inflected by the global discourse. In addition, Europe’s new governing tools, such as indicators, benchmarking and the open method of coordination express what the European education project is now about: the creation of a horizontal space of interdependent actors/ nations, sharing knowledge and risk in a constantly

changing world. This new European project may conceal other European meanings and obscure the fact that the European Union is not merely an abstract concept in a constant 'global' flux; but a sui generis political system, with an institutional configuration that differs both from nation states and international organisations such as the OECD (Eising and Kohler-Koch, 1999). In reporting the data below, we suggest that Europe appears to the UK/English policy actors as more or less interchangeable with global agencies, and without some of its older political references, which do not fit with the modernisation project, while the Scottish policy actors see Europe as offering a policy space of influence and learning.

We turn now to discussion of the data.

Policy Actors in Europe, Scotland and England

The data reported here come from interviews with policy actors in Europe, England and Scotland, selected on the basis that they have responsibility for some aspect of the intersection between transnational (European) data collection and analysis requirements and the development of national policy. This category includes different kinds of policy actors, but excludes politicians: our interviewees were inspectors, Analysts, statisticians and senior officials in the respective education departments. They also included Commission officials, and members of Eurostat and Eurydice. The questions that we asked these actors related to their perceptions of data sharing and use between the Commission and England and Scotland, and probed areas of difference in attitude to Europe and to the use of data within each system as seen from Europe. This highlighted some contrasts. First, some reflections from with the Commission on the growth of data:

It is exploding. Extraordinary. And the reason is the role of indicators and statistics in the open method of coordination....Inside the Commission we had a clear understanding that we had to develop that area because it is the strongest element in the open method of coordination. This is how the Commission can say that you can engage with certain objectives, you are not following them. Who is following, who succeeds, where the performance lies...(EU3)

This informant goes on to say that the Commission's analysts know more about national systems than do the members of any national system. He gave the following reason-it is not just because of having more data, but because of the more distant perspective that the Commission is able to adopt:

Because when you sit up to your neck in the English or the Scottish system, everything is Scottish. Everything is Scottish. This is our system, we defend it as a fortress and all these influences from outside, they should be kept away. By sitting here and making comparative analysis, you identify what is specifically Scottish to the Scottish system. What is it that you should actually defend to keep these roots in national culture and national institutions that are set up. We know it, or we could know it, we have the information, we have this distance that is necessary to do it. And we can compare and find out what is it that shines in the Scottish system.

The point made here about distinctiveness and diversity is emphasised by our European informants, at the same time as they acknowledge the influence of indicators on national systems. The issue of distinctiveness also emerges strongly in the data from the Scottish policy actors, while at the same time they reference Europe more often than do the English informants, and use these references to stress the

distinctiveness of Scotland and its differences from England. As an Inspector from Scotland comments, comparing English and Scottish Inspectorate inputs to a conference:

... the subject was very much self-evaluation and I gave a presentation and talked about the Scottish context and the fact that we don't collect [...] data at national level in the way that we would have done against 5-14 in our main approaches. And our English counterpart gave a presentation and talked about the PANDA system. And this incredible sort of complex machine and they were able to tell by the age of 11 ½ how youngsters will perform when they are X, Y and Z. (CP5S)

Scottish HMIe emphasise their role in explaining the 'distinctiveness of Scotland' to Europe, and use this opportunity to promote Scotland's approach as 'ahead of the game' but in line with evolving European-wide models of quality assurance across public sector services and business (CP6S). Indeed, the interviewees seem eager to portray Europe and their interactions with Europe as a network of people and ideas which travel and connect in unexpected and interesting ways. They construct the European education policy space as an area of exchange of experience and good practice. Interviewees describe a policy community, operating through more informal rather than formal relationships of policy dialogue, learning and trust:

We're talking about things which almost develop into friendships and good collegiate workingIt's constant ... and likely to become more [so]. And it seems to me having discussed it with colleagues at various meetings over in Europe, as more and more accession countries come in that a lot of the countries that are coming are actually seeking assistance and advice and

support. And they see particularly the European network policy makers group as a vehicle for that (CP5S).

So, that happens across Europe, with Inspectorates visiting us, or us visiting them. And then there are some joint initiatives which relate specifically to developing practice.[for example] ...we produced a common point of reference of a framework for self-evaluation and external evaluation of ICT, which is now widely available. Although I think none of us actually use the evaluation in our own national context, we all take account of it in developing our own thinking nationally....If there is something that emerges as a consensus across a number of specialist European bodies, then you would be ill advised to pay no attention to it in your own practice.(CP4S)

The data from interviewees in Scotland suggest that participating in the shared construction of a European education space is a working reality rather than or as much as a formal policy imperative; indeed they focus on the ways that they can contribute:

If you think about the Barcelona agreement and so on that that's not about an opt in or opt out....And this commitment to, you know, the particular areas that were identified as areas for improvement. So we ... I mean I don't think it was any ... ever been a discussion as will we participate or not. I think the question would really be how can we best participate. What can we contribute? Or what do we give back? CP5S)

This kind of referencing of Europe as a preferred policy community, which is also found in relevant policy texts, is less apparent in the policy discourse in

documentation in England, for example in the International Strategy for Education, Skills and Children's Services produced by the Department of Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) which is responsible for education in England but which here speaks for the UK as a whole:

We live in one world. What we do affects others, and what others do affect us as never before. To recognise that we are all members of a world community and that we all have responsibilities to each other is not romantic rhetoric, but modern economic and social reality. The UK occupies a unique position in this world: at the heart of the European Union and of the Commonwealth, deeply linked by language and other ties to the USA, a core member of the UN and of its constituent agencies, and an active participant in many other international bodies (DfES, 2004; 5)

And elsewhere:

We have historically played a full part in the work of the OECD and EU to benchmark performance across the developed world....We remain committed to international benchmarking programmes; and by developing strategic partnerships with individual countries in the EU, OECD and beyond, we will deepen our understanding of their systems and work together to identify areas for mutual learning and growth (DfES, 2004; 11)

Here England/UK policy discourse and positioning seeks to establish distinctiveness by reference to a 'world-class' education system, rather than any particular characteristics or attributes. There is a coherent narrative, across our

English informants, about the sophistication and capacity of the English system in terms of data production and use, and little sense of policy influence from the European Commission or other European organisations. Instead their references are global, and the Commission is seen to be less advanced than OECD:

They are just not nearly so far ahead as the OECD in terms of the competencies that they also have for carrying out big studies. That is, the expertise that they have in the Commission is not there at all. I am finding very much relying on people from individual countries like myself who have seen how it is done and sort of come back to their table and advise them on, tell them what we need to be looking over... We are probably ahead of other countries in terms of data used... Influence is almost going the other way (CP2E)

Because we have all this Key Stage Data and because it is longitudinal, we are practically, without boasting, we are probably the leading administration in the world as far as value-added measures and schooling are concerned (CP5E).

Incidentally, a European Commission interviewee has a rather different perspective on the data system in England. From a comment on the problem of data overproduction he goes on to raise the issue of costs and benefits:

Yes, we are overwhelmed with data and then we don't use them enough. We go to the next survey and then we have new data and so on. Well. I think there is a great difference between the data that countries need for monitoring the quality of their systems, like the English system which is monstrous. I always ask what is the cost-benefit. Have you ever made a cost-benefit analysis of what you are doing?

Int: What is the answer?

They smile (EU 3)

English and Scottish policy actors present a contrasting picture of the European education policy space: the English actors suggest that ambiguity and fluidity are due to lack of expertise and coordination at the European level, whereas the Scottish actors interpret fluidity more positively, as representing an ‘organic’ space of policy learning and exchange. In addition, where the Scottish actors present development as mutual policy learning, the English interviewees are more concerned to ‘preserve their position’:

There are some indicators at a very early stage of development and we need to keep an eye on that one as well. There’s not a lot of detail in these new indicators so we need the Commission to tell us a bit more. We do take part in working parties that address some of these but there’s not much detail and communication at the moment, so we sort of preserve our position on a few things particularly, so that we don’t increase burdens to a point that we don’t achieve response rates on any of these things (CP5E).

A DCFS key system actor, who is responsible for working with the EU and trans-national organisations on international assessment studies and other research on education, spoke about the diagnostic use of data and emphasised the more recent commitment to use the data in order to implement education reforms –data have to be ‘acted on’. However, international assessments and results are not to be compared or considered more significant than national data, especially in the case of England:

The PISA 2006 schools will be getting the data this month and NFER has been working on it, so we will obviously ask them how useful that has been. So I think that is the main way that this will be useful in quality assurance. I don't...at a national level, I can't say, well it can't be an independent benchmark of national performance. I mean you have to be very careful, we can use it alongside our national data but I wouldn't use it as a proxy for our national data. And I would say our national data is a far surer measure than any international study can ever be. (CP2E)

Moreover there is little evidence from the data from English policy actors of direct influence on policy from European sources, whereas some of our Scottish informants directly cite European sources of policy priorities: for example in relation to the current policy focus on underachievement:

That is definitely an example where the policy direction is strongly influenced by comparative work happening across Europe and wider. Positively Europe, actually. In that case, even though it is fraught with definitional problems, I have no doubt.(CP3S)

Discussion

The concept of 'multilevel governance' (Hooghe and Marks, 2001; Marks et al., 1996) has been broadly applied to the analysis of European governance and policy-making. It stresses the subtle, complex and interactive contact between the national and international level and, although it acknowledges interdependencies, puts emphasis on national policy regimes as distinctive from European or other influences. Le Galès (2003), on the other hand, maintains that the 'meso-government', rather than

the ‘centre-periphery’, argument is more suitable for the analysis of European policy-making, by presenting the policy process as fragmented into many organisations, agencies, networks and individuals that suggest negotiation, flexibility and ad hoc arrangements, rather than hierarchical and coherent processes. In relation to the European education policy space in particular, we suggest that the concept of ‘network governance’ is most persuasive, as it moves beyond the separation of different levels of governance into the analysis of a more fluid and ambiguous policy space. According to Eising and Kohler-Koch,

The core idea of network governance is that political actors consider problem-solving the essence of politics and that the setting of policy making is defined by the existence of highly organised sub-systems...the state’s role has changed from authoritative allocation “from above” to the role of the “activator”. Governing the EC involves bringing together the relevant state and societal actors and building issue specific constituencies (1999:5)

The UK/England governance of education is characterised by emphasis on policy outcomes and is not congruent with the practices and processes of the European education policy space which works through the setting of agendas and formulation of problems, but where formal policy decisions and implementation remain in the hands of national/state governments. Kingdon (1984) describes the processes of policy making and networking in the European scene as a ‘policy soup’ in which specialists/ experts/ epistemic communities/ policy makers try out their ideas in a variety of ways. Some proposals ‘float’ longer than others and may be revised and combined with others to increase their viability. The proposals that survive over a series of meetings, that meet several criteria, are technically feasible and fit with

dominant values are translated into the domestic policy space in order to test their relevance to the national mood, their budgetary workability and the support they will receive.

This characterisation may help to explain why Scottish policy actors seem to be much more aware of and at home with such policy processes that work through finding common meanings and sharing ideas and practices. Policy makers in England on the other hand, seem less comfortable with such approaches, and see them as neither effective nor transparent.

In searching for theoretical resources that help to make sense of these differences, we find Beyers and Trondal's (2003) concept of 'ambiguous representation' particularly useful in explaining the divergence of the policy approach to Europe of the English and Scottish actors:

The ambiguous representation takes into account that actors are embedded in multiple institutional settings. Accordingly, the emergence of supranational or intergovernmental roles is not only a matter of organisational contingencies at the EU-level. Bureaucrats are faced with at least dual allegiances; they are national officials working part-time at the European level. Multiple embeddedness implies dilemmas regarding what authority actors actually possess, whose interests are represented and how conflicting views are reconciled. ... Under these ambiguities actors may either fall back on familiar and traditional roles or, under certain conditions search for new roles like the supranational one. Because political superiors, i.e. domestic politicians, are not directly involved in EU-communities,

information asymmetries may emerge between them and the participating officials.

In this situation it is difficult for politicians to elaborate detailed negotiations and therefore, the bureaucrat has the leeway to act with some degree of autonomy (2003; no page numbers).

This argument suggests some explanations of the reasons for Scottish policy actors being more open to policy exchange and learning, even under conditions of fluidity and negotiation. In fact, according to Beyers and Trondal's research (2003), 'bureaucrats from federal polities are more likely to adopt a supranational role than those coming from unitary policies'. When working groups are organised at a European level according to the principle of a specific purpose or sector, it is easier for them to transcend territorial representation and adopt an intergovernmental role. Although Scottish policy actors are eager to present a Scottish agenda, they seem also more willing to learn from their peers and exchange knowledge.

As well as being more at home with interdependencies, another element of the explanation may lie in the way in which Euroscepticism in Scotland was replaced by support for Europe as a means of encouraging the devolution agenda. Europe became an alternative point of reference for Scotland: UK policy developments could be challenged or mediated through reference to the EU. As Brown, McCrone and Paterson (1998) argue, the growing significance of the EU was an important factor in the politics of Scottish self-government between 1979 and 1999. They point to four aspects: first, Europe was attractive to the Scottish National Party as an alternative framework of external security and trading opportunities; second, the EU favoured subsidiarity, an argument that could be used in favour of devolution in the UK; third, Europe-and especially small social democratic states- became the source of

modernising and progressive ideas, rather than England; and lastly, in the years of the Conservative government's 'rolling back the state', Europe seemed to favour a social partnership model which had been rejected in Westminster. Hearn suggests that Scottish nationalism was reinforced by Europeanization because 'the steady growth of the European Union has both eaten into the sovereignty of the British state, and made the viability within the EU seem more plausible, and Scottish independence less isolationist' (2000; 5). This is not to imply that the Scottish policy actors quoted here are Nationalists: rather that Europe offers Scotland a resource for the recognition of its difference from the larger, more powerful and more visible UK system of England. In fact, as indicated above, while the UK is the EU's 'reluctant partner', Scotland is arguably building an identity between two unions, one in the UK and one in Europe (Dardanelli, 2005).

Here it is also worth noting that education in Scotland has played a particularly strong role historically in the shaping and support of national identity (McCrone, 1992; Paterson, 1997), as one of the 'holy trinity' (Paterson 1994) of institutions-Law and the Church being the others- that encapsulated Scotland's 'stateless nationhood' from 1707-1999. Since the election of a Nationalist government in 2007, and the end of shared party political control across the UK and Scottish governments, there are strong incentives for the Scottish Government to signal positions (including on Europe) that are independent of policy direction in England, and that do not take England or the UK as the natural reference point but instead highlight Scotland's similarities to small, continental European countries like Denmark and Finland within Europe.

Policy actors in England, on the other hand, maintain a distance from European education policy making. Although they do, as one said ‘keep an eye’ on it, they position themselves more in the global, rather than the European, field. They claim two positions there: on the one hand, they present themselves as influencing and controlling developments within Europe. On the other hand they position themselves as key global actors, preferring to lobby at a global supranational level, and avoid becoming locked into any one set of relationships, advocacy coalitions, policy communities or networks. Perhaps most significantly education is too profitable a field for the UK/England to restrict it to the European scene: according to the DfES International Strategy (2004), ‘in 2001-2 UK education and training exports amounted to an estimated £10.3 billion, making it a significant contributor simply as an industrial sector to the UK economy...this market is however, likely to be much more competitive and will require a coherent approach to maintaining the quality and value for money of UK provision’.

Finally, returning to the theme of data as an instrument of governance in the new calculative rationality of modern governance, these interview data may perhaps be read as suggesting that there is stronger mediation of ‘governing by numbers’ in contexts where cultural and historical considerations have more resonance-in this case, Scotland in the European policy space, rather than England which locates itself in a space of global competition. Of course we recognise that the data presented here come from a small number of informants, but we believe that, in combination with our other data sources, it does illuminate policy responses to Europeanisation in England and Scotland, and the place of performance data in the construction of these perhaps increasingly divergent relations.

Conclusion

This paper set out to challenge two assumptions which we suggest are quite widely illustrated in the literature on education policy making. The first concerned the emphasis on global, transnational agendas promoted by organisations like OECD and the World Bank, and the relative neglect of the European Education Policy Space (EEPS). We fully accept the importance of the pressure towards standardisation and conformity and the creation of the individualised, responsible learner exercised by transnational agencies such as OECD (Grek et al 2009) and also note the ways in which the European ‘project’ is closely aligned with these directions. However we suggest that attention to the working practices and processes of Europe, in particular its capacity to steer policy through the **open method of co-ordination** (OMC) and drive convergence through indicators and benchmarks, merits closer attention, and that such attention should include recognition of the policy work of making Europe that is done through informal networks, negotiations and learning (Hartmann 2008). The second dominant assumption with which we took issue is that of referencing an undifferentiated UK or ‘Britain’ as the point of reference in talking about education policy developments and the interaction of global and national forces. We believe that the material presented here, along with the messiness and ambiguity of UK political devolution, combine to make a case for more consideration to be given to the complexity of the UK policy space, not least in its interactions with, and contrasting uses of, Europe.

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